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### Exercise Science Degree Allows GWU Alum to Pursue Career in NASCAR

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# Exercise Science Degree Allows GWU Alum to Pursue Career in NASCAR

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Office of University  
Communications

January 6, 2017

## *Matt Skeen ('07) Trains Pit Crews for Hendrick Motorsports*

In 12 seconds, a six-member NASCAR pit crew can empty two 12-gallon gas cans, weighing 81 pounds each, change four tires and make minor adjustments to the car. Matt Skeen, a 2007 graduate of Gardner-Webb University, is one of the trainers who prepares the crew for the physical demands of the job.

photo of Matt Skeen in the race shop

Skeen majored in health and wellness (now exercise science) and played football at GWU. He was a two-time All Big South Conference player and a member of the GWU team that won the Big South Conference Championship in 2003. Between his junior and senior year at Gardner-Webb, Skeen interned for Hendrick Motorsports (HMS) in Charlotte, N.C. He learned about the opportunity from Dr. Franki Burch, Associate Provost for Professional and Graduate Studies, who had been contacted by the organization's head strength and conditioning coach.

The summer internship opened the door for a full-time job training the pit crews for drivers Jimmie Johnson, Dale Earnhardt Jr., Kasey Kahne and Chase Elliot. In the 10 years since he joined HMS, Skeen has been a part of six NASCAR Sprint Cup titles, one X-Finity Championship, one All-Star Pit Crew Championship and two Mechanix Wear Pit Crews of the Year. "My responsibilities include assisting the head strength and conditioning coach, administration and promotion in all aspects of the strength and conditioning program," Skeen explained. "Specifically, I design and implement strength protocols, instruction, supervision and evaluation of all pit crew members. I make sure they are strong, fast and flexible enough to perform their duties around the racecar as fast as possible."

Matt Skeen, fourth from left, celebrates Jimmie Johnson's third NASCAR championship in 2008.

Skeen chose to major in exercise science, because he wanted a job that would allow him to stay involved in athletics. "The classes I took at GWU prepared me to enter the workforce with a strong base knowledge allowing me to implement things I had learned into daily tasks," he observed. "I also felt equipped to pursue post-graduate certifications to maintain and advance my position within the company."

Besides preparing him for his career, Gardner-Webb was a place where he developed friendships that are still important in his life today. “You cannot help but build new, strong friendships while on campus at GWU,” Skeen assessed. “As a member of the Alumni Board of Directors, I continuously hear about people and friendships that alumni take away as top experiences from GWU. Gardner-Webb is not just a University, it is a small, close-knit community. You are not just a number. Professors, staff and students know each other by name. There are no limits at GWU. Academically, spiritually and athletically, Gardner-Webb can offer you everything you need to get to the next step in your life.”